

State Natural Areas Volunteer Handbook

Wisconsin SNA Volunteer Handbook

From showy Chiwaukee Prairie in the south to Lost Creek Bog in the north, Wisconsin is blessed with an abundance of places showcasing natural beauty. State Natural Areas protect these places along with the geology, plants, and wildlife within them. It is no wonder that Wisconsinites are proud to have built the nation's oldest and largest system of state natural areas to protect our natural heritage for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.

Caring for nearly 700 sites is a big job and one that gets more important as invaders like giant reed grass and buckthorn take over more ground across our state. To meet this challenge, the Department of Natural Resources is increasingly turning to volunteers to help multiply staff time, give more sites the attention they need, and develop dedicated, knowledgeable advocates for SNAs. As Aldo Leopold famously said, "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

What you'll find in this handbook

This manual seeks to help you, the SNA manager or lead volunteer, assess whether a volunteer group would benefit your sites and, if the answer is yes, to walk you through the steps to recruit, train, retain, and reward these volunteers. The handbook also spells out the legal requirements governing DNR use of volunteers and provides examples of the forms and other materials necessary to run safe, sustainable, and effective volunteer programs that benefit volunteers and SNAs alike.

The State Natural Areas volunteer program has modeled our structure on those of other state programs, county forest preserve districts, non-profit organizations, city volunteer programs, and the WDNR Park Program's volunteer positions. We modified those approaches according to our needs and incorporated lessons learned in a pilot volunteer program started in 2011. We follow the guidelines in the Wisconsin DNR Property Managers Guidance MC 1405.1 (2010), the Recreation Area Operations Handbook chapter 700 (MC 2505.1), and Safety Requirements for Chainsaw Operations (MC 9185.3).

Our goals and mission

Our goal is to establish a community of volunteers that supports the SNA program efforts to “protect outstanding examples of Wisconsin’s native landscape of natural communities, significant geological formations and archeological sites.” Volunteers will actively restore these sites across the state through opportunities that fit their available time and skills.

Our mission is to “engage, support, and empower volunteers who help take care of State Natural Areas.”

With growth, we believe the SNA Volunteer Program can enhance public interest, volunteer support, and the ecological health of State Natural Areas.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

– Margaret Mead

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Let's continue forward, to enjoy and care for Wisconsin's State Natural Areas together!